

My Trip Over Seas.

With one long blast of the whistle as our only ceremony the S. S. Handcock loaded to its capacity with Marines backed out into the river at the Philadelphia Navy Yard on June 8th., 1917. and headed for across the seas. Unlike many soldiers who came over later there was no music no friends to bid us farwell no waving flags we just simply left to go to war in the same fashion as the Marines have always left their native shores to fight on foreign soil. In spite of all this to me our leaving was a great event for it ment we were at last headed for the front where the forces of many nations were struggleing for the Worlds Democracy.

Soon after we got under way everyone was ordered below deck for the date of our sailing was kept secret and to see a ship loaded with soldiers going to sea would have told its own story to any agent of the Germans left to watch our movements. Below deck all were getting their equipment as well as themselves settled for a long voyge and the music we lacked at the pier was now in evidence for the band had struck up and was playing "Goodby America". Everyone was intensely happy for were we not the First to France which ment the First to Fight? Many of these same boys who sung the loudest will never return but their songs and deeds will go down in history as the greatest events in the world's history. Their wonderful work and sacrafise will live forever. More power to the Marines.

The ballance of the day and night was uneventful but early the next morning we were ordered to get ready to abandon ship. As the ship was not moving and as were enveloped in a heavy fogg and did not know where we were many were the speculations as to the cause of the delay. Some said we had sprung aleak while others said that hiden bombs were found in the coal - bunkers and therefore not safe to continue our trip. As a matter of fact the real reason was to allow us to transfer to a much larger ship and use the one were on for supplies. We were in the Hudson River at the time as we learned later and it took an increditabily short time to transfer over twenty seven hundred Marines to the other ship which was taking us across on her maiden voyge. In the course of time this was accomplished and we were again under speed this time not to stop until we reached France.

LIFE ABOARD SHIP DURING OUR TRIP ACROSS.

The next morning found us outside of land and our trip had really begun. As the sun came up and fluded the heavens with its golden glow it was a wonderful sight to see the many transports with their convoys following us in a straight line almost as far as the eye could see. Each ship directly behind the other and all belching out black smoke made a picture I shall never forget. By this time we were allowed on deck, in fact this was necessary as every hole and corner of the great ship was crowded with soldiers. A regular routine of drills was established and put into affect almost at once. There was settingup excersises in the morning before breakfast then breakfast after which followed drills and inspections. After dinner more drills until four o'clock at which time we were allowed to do our owne work suchas washing clothes and getting ready our things for another inspection. It seemed to me as a rookie that there was never any end to the inspections of equipment, clothes, ones person and quarters. All these thing I have learned later however.

Abondum ship drill and the use of life preservers was taught us every day during the entire trip and it was very common to have to turn out at ten o'clock at night to abondum ship. During the last few days of the trip when we were well within the danger zone we were ordered to wear or life belts at all times both day and night. There were lookouts all over the ship, at the mast head, at the bough, at the stern, and at every gun as well as the many ships officers stationed on the bridge. To me it seemed next to impossible

for a submarine to get within shooting distance and not be seen by someone but during the trip I was to think different. Every other day we had gun practis with the big guns mounted on the various parts of the ship for protection and when one was fired it shook the ship from stem to stern. It was a great sight to see the shell go skipping across the water throwing spray high into the air wherever it struck and at last hitting its target and sending great columns of water high into the air. Target practis was always a great amusement to us and many bets were made before the firing of a gun as to whether it would hit the target or not.

On Sundays we had religious services with music and the day was devoted to such amusements and recreations as were at our command. As I now look back over the eighteen months I have been here I can see where this trip was one of the pleasantest I have ever had altho at the time it seemed dull for we were twenty-two days in coming across. Life aboard ship had much of interest at that for there were the great engines to examin and trips down into the hole where we had our stores also the fireroom where its intense heat fairly made your flesh blister.

Life aboard ship as I have described it went on about the same from day to day and it was seldome that we saw any ships except those in our own convey. One day however when all seemed as before except that we knew we were well within the danger zone one of the ships blew six blasts of her whistle. This we knew to be the signal for subs, and immediately we started on a zigzag course increasing our speed as we went. The other ships in the convey were also doing the same and shortly we began firing for a German submarine had been sighted not far from the ship who had given the alarm. Whether we made a hit or not we never knew and shortly after we ceased firing and continued our trip without further excitement.

After covering nearly four thousand miles we were met by a large convey of cruisers torpedo chasers and several battle ships who were to remain with us for the ballance of our trip. By this time there was great speculating as to where we were to land. Some said England while others claimed inside information and said we would land in France. No one really knew and when we came in sight of land early one morning it was only after we were met by a government tug flying the French flag that we really knew we had landed in France. It proved to be St. Nazaire and as we came up to the pier we were greeted by every whistle in the harbor and the celebration we lacked when leaving home was more than made up for over here. Flags everywhere and not a few American flags were to be seen hanging along side the French. It was a great treat to us boys after seeing nothing but water for so many days. Women and children were everywhere but where were the men? With the exception of a few very old men and cripples hardly a man was to be seen. This was my first opportunity to see first hand and fully realise how France had to drain her manpower in order to keep enough soldiers at the front.

My first impressions of France was that it was a wonderful country and that I should like it also her people who gave us such a reception. As we were towed to our pier I had a good chance to see the town from the water front and it was not unlike some I have seen in South America with its tile roofs and plaster walls. It was two or three days before we were allowed to leave the ship and I don't mind saying that I got lost before I finally got back that night. The town proved quite large with good stores and hotels where we could get something good to eat. Prices we found high but not as high as they have become during the last year. It seemed good to again stand on dry land again but it was several days before I lost the motion of the boat.

On the outskirts of the town and overlooking the harbor we had camp and a more ideal place in which to enjoy the summer sunshine would have been hard to find. It was here that we spent our first American holiday which was the good old Fourth of July. To be sure there was not much to do still we enjoyed it and here and there a lucky beggar got a pass to town which meant a good dinner and a visit to the movies. We were here only two weeks during which time the boys were drilling and getting ready for the big show. We all expected to go to the front at once but those who knew the game were up against knew it would be months and months of the hardest kind of training before we would be ready to go into line.

Across France in Side-door Bullmons.

When the order came to break camp we all expected we should go at once to the front and it was with a great deal of pep that we took down our tents packed our belongings and climbed aboard the trucks which the French furnished to take us to the depot. Our spirits fell several degrees however when we saw the kind of cars we had to travel in. As one Marine said "why those are freight cars" and so they were altho about half the size of ours. Each car was marked with the number of Homs, this is french for men and with about thirty men to a car we pulled out for where we did not know but as the American soldiers soon adapted himself to conditions as he finds them we were soon singing our fool heads off. All about what we were going to do to the Kizer.

Three days and nights travel in the above described cars did not even dampen our spirits for as far as we knew we were headed for Berlin. We sung we read, those of us fortunate enough to have books, looked at miles and miles of scenery and waved to all the pretty girls as we passed thro the stations. It seemed as if the entire town had turned out to greet us and where ever the train stopped we were fairly taken off our feet so anxious were the people to shake us by the hand and wish us God' Speed. Several times we broke out the band and played to the people as we passed thro the village or station. Once when the train stopped a woman came out with a big basket of wine for us boys. It soon disappeared however without my getting anything but a good news picture. I might say here that during the trip I had made many pictures both movies and still which have long since gone the rounds of every newspaper magazine and theatre in the country.

Every station had its crowd to greet us and where there were but few in the smaller places you could bet they represented every one in the place who could possibly get there. Never were troops received with such cheering and good will as we received from the French during our trip across the Country. I remember that just before I left the States I bought several small silk flags, one American, one French, one Belgium and one English. These I have displayed wherever I have been billeted and they have brought fourth a salute more than once. Going to war has given me a far better idea of what our flag stands for than I could ever had back in the States. Not alone is it the best in the world but it represents the best the world can offer and proud am I to claim it as my own.

Celebrations and the changing scenes along with the novelty of traveling under such conditions made our trip seem shorter than it really was still we were with pretty tired and stiff lot of men who finally arrived in Menaucourt on July 18th 1917. We were greatly surprised not to hear the booming of guns for we fully expected that we had arrived at the front or at least just back of the lines. Months of training such as we had never dreamed of were ahead of us but being new to such kind of warfare as we had come over to fight we did not appreciate this. From now on our training will begin in earnest.

Training under the Chaussiers.

My experience in traveling by freight cars was but a beginning for my inexperience was to receive yet another shock. When we arrived at our destination I was told that I would be billeted in town. This sounded good but afterwards proved to be nothing more or less than a hayloft in one of the houses in a small village. I believe I kicked at this for no one outside of tramps could sleep under such conditions. Long ago I have many times been thankful for a place as good and dry as that which I had upon my arrival. Such a hayloft as I had the first days in France would have been Heaven later when nothing but the stars above me and screaming shells both going and coming to shelter me.

To get back to our training. The Chaussiers are a crack French Division of Alpine soldiers and considered the best in France. Several officers and enlisted men who spoke English were turned over to us as instructors and for the next three months we drilled as we never had drilled before and done things unknown to us on the other side. At first the boys did not take kindly to digging miles and miles of trenches but later when at the front and your only safety was to dig in then how they would dig.

Digging trenches, building barbed wire, constructing dugouts, throwing grenades and such work was the daily routine for months. Bayonet exercises with dummies and every conceivable form of training was carried on with a vengeance all of which was to prepare us for the big show to come later. Gas mask drills through gas filled chambers was next in order and attacks carried on at night as near under the conditions existing at the front as possible in order that we might learn the latest art of war making. By this time we fully realized that it would be months even yet before we would go over the top except in practice but sometime the results of all this training would tell and so it did.

While here we made many friends and even opened a club for the soldiers which was formerly the school house. Each one did their share towards fixing it up. I remember I painted the place and we all chipped in and bought new furniture, a carpet for the floor, books, and with what the Red Cross donated we had quite some club house. Later the Y. M. C. A. opened a hut and canteen so we were pretty well fixed for amusement. Band concerts every Sunday in the town square helped to pass the time and now that I look back I consider this my pleasantest stay in France.

Orders to Move.

When the order came to move we again thought it would be to the front but such did not prove to be the case for we had only begun our training. This time it was only a short trip lasting about one day and night and took us to another small town called Damblain. Up to this time we had seen very little of warfare outside an occasional troop train headed for the front. All were getting as hard as nails and wishing that the battle would start at once but there was still more for us to learn.

This time I drew a billet which was a small room and for five francs or about a dollar a month I was able to hire a small stove. Here we staid all winter and for nearly five months continued training and preparing. It seemed to me that long ago we were ready for any fight that the Germans could ever put up but it was not until February that we did finally leave for the front.

It was here that we spent Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years and on all three times we enjoyed turkey and all the fixings. All this is back in 1917 and seems many years ago. Our stay in Damblain was equally as pleasant as in Menacourt and the people done everything in their power to make things

homelike for the boys who were so far away from their own fireside. There were many Marines stationed in the nearby towns for it would have been out of the question to place them all in one town. This meant many trips from town to town to see friends and the time passed very quickly. In those days mail came fairly promptly, we had a good Y. M. C. A. with movies several nights each week, one or two clubs similar to the one back in the other town and it was with some regret that we finally left this time to actually go to the front. During all these months I had made pictures of every drill every new manual of arms and in fact everything worth shooting at but outside of being a record of events pertaining to our training they are nothing compared to what I got later of actual warfare.

THE FRONT AT LAST.

With eight months of intensive training it was a hardy lot of Marines that intrained for the front and we all listened keenly for the first sound of cannons as we neared the end of our journey. It was a cold trip and we were stiff and sore when we at last neared the end of our journey. Early one morning as we were rumbling along my bunkie said "did you hear that, I listened, there it was again a low deep boom. Several other of the boys had also heard it and we all set up a great shout for we were within hearing distance of the greatest war the world had ever known. By this time it was quite light and we were able to see a whole squadron of planes headed for us. I can truthfully say I was somewhat uneasy for I did not know whether they were French or German. Had they been the later I doubt if I should be writing this now. They came over us flying very low and followed us for some ways then turned off and soon disappeared in the distance. By this time the bombing of cannons would be distinctly heard and many of the towns we passed thru had been badly shot up.

Finally we arrived and a more bleak and barren country it would be hard to imagine. Barbed wire running in every direction and trenches and destroyed buildings on every hand. We were hurriedly marched from the train landing for the Germans had been dropping bombs only that morning and had destroyed nearly all our band instruments. Planes were in the air everywhere but all French and it was not until several days later that I witnessed my first real air battle. As I said we were marched from the rail head and then began my first real hike since coming to France. What a trip and what a load as few things became long before I arrived to a place where we got trucks in which to finish our trip.

Everything that we saw from now on was a scene of destruction, all towns were almost totally destroyed and the never ceasing trenches and barbed wire spread in every direction. The roads however were in fairly good condition but always crowded with trucks, cannons, soldiers and all headed for the front. It was my first sight of this sort of activity and I made many good shots with my camera. The bombing continued from time to time but still seemed a long way off. I learned that we were still probably twenty five miles from the front and it was only the heavier calibered guns that we were hearing.

It was not until night that we finally reached our P. O. This is the French for Post of Command. It proved to be a small one of but few huts and was well hidden in the trees just off the road. Here we learned that we were in the famous Verdun Sector and believe me it was some place. We were quite comfortable at that and except for the distant booming of guns you would never know we were near the front. Here was located the French telegraph

and telephone centrals also the offices of the Commanding General. The frenchmen proved good companions and many a good sing we had at night around their funny little stoves.

MY FIRST VIEW OF THE REAL TREANCHES.

After staying here a couple of days I decided that I wanted to see what real treanches were like so with a companion we started out. We had to walk some six miles and as we neared the front we found that the trees were no longer standing but shot down. From time to time shells were even falling on the road on which we were traveling so we cut across the country each one with gas mask at alert and very much alive to the new experience. Finally we reached a trench which came to the road and we turned off at this point for the front. My first observation was that these treanches were not unlike those we had used while in practice but if anything ~~were~~ were better and more comfortable. Even treanches can be made to be comfortable after a fashion.

We walked for what seemed miles turning this way and turning that way and finally came to a place where the trench went under the road. At this point a sentry told us to hurry as the Germans shelled the road pretty often and so they did for we were no sooner under the road and going thro the short tunnel when bang and the entire earth shook. This was followed in quick succession by others and whereas I felt safe being under ground still I had not got used to shells dropping almost on ones head. This stopped after a while and we continued on our way with nothing more exciting than getting lost until we reached Brigade Headquarters.

From now on it is the fashion, decided by the Germans, that all shall live in dugouts so headquarters proved to be down in one of these made fairly comfortable by a stove and the fact that fresh air was blown down to us every five minutes. Here I met the commanding officer who after learning that I wanted to get photographs of the front line detailed a man to show us the sights. This he was willing to do but said there was not much doing until night. We started and again walked miles and miles always thro treanches finally to come at the foot of a big hill. Our guide explained that the Germans were on the other side of the hill and we could even get a view of them from the top so being both brave and desiring pictures of said Germans I said let the parade start at once and we did. Winding around in treanches with only the sky to be seen is not the most interesting thing in the world for an afternoons entertainment but as we came nearer the top I found the treanches had been shot pretty well to pieces and that in order not to be see it was necessary on my part to crouch down while I walked.

In this uncomfortable position we walked or crawled for perhaps thirty minutes then our guide made motions to stop which we did. He said we will soon come to openings in the treanches overlooking the Germans and if you are careful not to be seen you can even see them at work in their treanches. We again proceded and soon came to one of the openings such as our guide had described. Sure enough there on the side of the next hill was treanches simular if not exactly like ours but before I had a good look BANG ---- BANG ----- BANG. Now I had already heard many such but as these three shots were presented to us personally by the Germans who had spied us while crossing the above mentioned openings I am not ashamed to say I was pretty well scared for unlike most shells exploding we knew the three bangs were fired directly at us. The rest of the trip bending down now even more than ever and dreading to hurry past the openings that came more frequently than ever kept my heart in my mouth pretty much all the time until we come back on the other and far side from the enemys treanches. Here I was told by

the sentry that I could get a good look at a nearby German village by standing on the top of the trenches. After what I had just gone thro this was rich and I asked if the Germans could see me and was told that they could very easily; but that it was not considered dangerous providing one was not engaged in anything except looking over the country. This seemed a pretty poor garrantee still I was both anxious to see as well as to get pictures so decided to take a chance. Took the chance also the picture even saw Germans at work in the village and nothing happened outside the increased heartbeats and additional perspiration which was running down my back.

It was not until now that it occured to me to ask where all the men were for I had not seen twenty men in my entire trip. I was told that during the day they sleep coming out only at night to man the trenches we had so recently come thro. With the exception of a few sentrys and outposts there was not fifty men in the whole line. Well so much for the first day I had been thro the first line trenches, been shot at three times, looked over into a German village and saw them at work and so decided to call it a day for I was very tired and still miles from camp.

My trip home lasted until night and I thought I would never get there. Covered with the mud I had rubbed off in going thro the trenches, foot sore and weary, and all in down and out. My reward comes now that I see my pictures printed in the home papers taken during this trip and it is all worth while altho the public at home seldom realize the hardships and dangers of the photographer in getting these pictures. There were many other days similar to this one some evn more exciting and decidedly more dangerous than my initial trip. Trips out thro NO Mans Land to the outpost where you can look almost into the German trenches and where it is necessary to speak in whispers so as not to be heard. Such trips as these has furnished some of my most remarkable pictures and have often been taken while under fire. This is now long ago an old story and bursting shells have both lost their interest and have to come pretty close to cause me to hit the dust (lie down in the dirt)

For nearly six weeks we staid here holding the line but never starting anything big as we were only here for training. Would our training never stop and allow us to show the Boche what the boys from the U. S. A could do? Our turn came later and the Marines have made good. Later we were ordered to a rest area and after several days travel we finally arrived where we again went in to training. You may be sure that by now we were both trained in body as well as mind which was exactly what we needed.

It was while here that the call came by the French for troupes to stem the ever advancing tide of Germans in their advance on Paris. They had reached Chateau Thierry and it was simply a question of a few days when they would be within bombing distance of Paris. It was at such a time we were called to stop if possible the downfall of Paris for such the French considered the situation. The whole world knows how we came and conquered but I will give you a little idea what my part consisted of in this move. The greater the event the more interest attached to the photographs which I make covering the event.